

*The desert is blooming!  
Find the best spots to  
work out your camera.  
PAGE 3*

# East Kern

*April 2017*

## Visions



# East Kern

## Visions

April 2017

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**ON THE COVER:**  
*A bee searches for pollen  
among the inviting yellow  
flowers in Short Canyon.  
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MICHAEL SMIT/DAILY INDEPENDENT



# The desert is blooming ... here's where



MICHAEL SMIT/DAILY INDEPENDENT  
**Yellow and purple flowers break in to add variety to the yellow fields of coreopsis flowers in Short Canyon.**

**BY MICHAEL SMIT**  
*The Daily Independent*

**A**fter years of drought that left Southern California dry and forced the implementation of new water management measures, this winter saw so much precipitation that dams threaten to break and agencies are releasing water from the L.A. Aqueduct because they have too much. This rain brings many benefits, but one of the most visible ones is just now popping up: the desert is blooming.

The brown and barren landscape Ridgecrest residents have become accustomed to sprouted green foliage in recent weeks, and many of those green plants have opened blooming flowers, covering the hills with a carpet of yellow petals sprinkled with patches of purple.

It's the right time for photography enthusiasts to head to the hills with camera in hand to build up that photography portfolio, hang another photo on the wall, or perhaps even just fetch some coveted likes on Instagram.

For those interested in witnessing the bloom, here are a few places around town to find those flowers.

## Short Canyon

Short Canyon, located northwest of Ridgecrest, is part of the 74,640-acre Owens Peak Wilderness. It's a popular spot year-round for hikers, equestrians, and campers due to the beauty and variety of its landscape.

To get there, take Inyokern Road heading west, then turn right at Highway 395. Turn left shortly after Highway 395 meets Highway 14. This goes to a frontage road with a gas station and Brady's Mini Mart. Turn left on the frontage road, and then a few seconds later turn right after the billboard onto a dirt road called Short Canyon Road.

The road is dirt, but is decently maintained and should be drivable for two-wheel-drive vehicles as long as the road is dry and the speed is kept down.

The flowers of Short Canyon are just starting to open and should reach

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full bloom soon. On top of the Coreopsis and Blue Phacelias, which are also found along the Rademacher Hills Trail, Short Canyon features a large variety of flowers ranging from orange California poppies to white buckwheats poking out from the fields of yellow flowers.

The area also features larger bushes of bladderpods with their bright yellow flowers and Indigo Bushes with, as the name suggests, long stems of deep purple flowers.

The bush flowers are enticing to more than just people. Watch for bees, although they typically aren't a problem. They're more interested in the pollen.

### **Rademacher Hills Trail**

Rademacher Hills Trail is the hilly area surrounding Cerro Coso Community College. This area is public land managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

Getting there is simple: When going south on South China Lake Boulevard, turn left onto College Heights Boulevard. Hills with patches of yellow flow-



MICHAEL SMIT/DAILY INDEPENDENT

**Miles of yellow brittlebush plants line Highway 395 after it merges with Highway 14.**

ers will be visible within 2 miles. After passing through the college, the road becomes dirt. Much of it is still drivable with a typical sedan so long as the driving is slow, the road is dry, and the driver avoids steep inclines.

The area of Rademacher Hills behind Cerro Coso is particularly beautiful cur-

rently. Lakes of little yellow Coreopsis flowers are easy to find, and they're often peppered with small patches of Blue Phacelia flowers.

The fields of Coreopsis seem to form the backdrop for the Blue Phacelias, which are solo artists of the show. Their blueish purple flowers seem to unravel

by rolling out from a small pod, like a butterfly emerging from its cocoon.

### **Neil Ranch Road and Highway 395**

It may not be the most glamorous getaway for reconnecting with nature, but the area along Highway 395 just north of where it connects with Highway 14 is honestly vibrantly colorful, filled with a dense variety of botanical beauty. Just the offramp itself from the 395 to the 14 feels like driving into a yellow kaleidoscope.

Neil Ranch Road provides a convenient and safe turnoff for photographers interested in filming flowers without getting flattened by a semi truck. Once there, keep an open eye for the range of colors available, rather than the typical field of yellow. Expect to see plenty of tall yellow brittlebushes, long red apricot globemallows, and stringy purple Filaree storksills.

To get there, follow Inyokern Road heading west out of Ridgecrest. Exit right on the 395. The 395, already running northwest, will turn directly north

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after seven miles and merge with the 14. Neil Ranch Road is a smooth dirt road just less than two miles after the merging of the two highways.

## **Walker Pass**

Some flowers bloom small, and some flowers bloom large. Walker Pass has some of the largest flowers found in the Mojave Desert. The Joshua Trees have begun to bloom.

Joshua Trees are an iconic symbol of the Mojave Desert. Their eerily arm-like branches have granted many desert explorers a free trip down the uncanny valley. These recognizable trees take 60 years to reach maturity, and can survive for more than 500 years. If one hasn't seen their bloom, it's an opportunity that should not be missed; they do not bloom every year.

Their tightly packed white flowers appear in a bundle at the end of their long branches. The trees have grown comfortable in the desert and developed a day-night cycle in their bloom. Though you'll find better lighting for pictures in the day, the Joshua Tree flowers spread their wings, and fragrance, in the more comfortable climate of the night.

To get there, follow Inyokern Road heading west out of Ridgecrest. Turn left on the 14, then drive for just less than 3 miles. Turn right on 178. Within minutes, you'll begin to see sparse Joshua Trees. Drive a few more minutes, and there'll be more Joshua Trees than you know what to do with.❖



MICHAEL SMIT/DAILY INDEPENDENT

**The Joshua Trees along Walker Pass are blooming this year. Their tightly packed, white flowers remain pulled in during the day, then open in the night hours.**

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# Wildflower photography is easy if you follow a few simple rules

BY JIM MATTHEWS

[www.OutdoorNewsService.com](http://www.OutdoorNewsService.com)

It's wildflower season across Southern California. You know what that means? Social media and emails will be jammed with poor to mediocre photos of flowers with the people who snapped the images gushing about how amazing this "super bloom" is this year. Gaaaack! It's starting.

Don't get me wrong — I'm an addicted wildflower and blossom photographer. I even have an album on my personal Facebook page entitled "Blossoms." But what is disheartening to me is that apparently most people can't compose an image or operate a camera. With the exceptional quality of photography equipment today, even on cell phones, this should be wonderful time of year for sharing. Instead, it reminds me of when I was a kid and was forced to watch horrible slide shows with blurry images, crooked horizons, and clowning children in front of signs. They were from friends' vacations to June Lake or the Grand Canyon. Wildflower season has become as bad.

It's enough to make you want to run screaming into brightly-colored desert.

So I'm going to help you take better pictures. Here are Jim's Simple Rules of Wildflower Photography.

**GET CLOSE, AND THEN GET CLOSER:** Most phone cameras have amazing close-up abilities. For serious amateur photographers, invest in a macro or close-focusing lens. Vast fields of flowers might inspire you, but they generally don't photograph all that dramatically. But if you get right up in that flower's face, you can get a dramatic image. You don't shoot pictures of your family at Disneyland from 200 feet away so they are just more faces in the crowd, do you? (Please, tell me you don't!) Think of those individual blossoms as a long-lost member of the family



MICHAEL SMIT/DAILY INDEPENDENT

**The deep purple flowers of the Ingrid Bush, scattered throughout Short Canyon, make enticing targets for interested insects.**

smiling naturally for you. Get close.

**PAY ATTENTION TO THE BACKGROUND:** The biggest problem with flower images is that the background — the part of the image that is not flowers — is often cluttered and jumbled with distracting shapes and colors. You want the focus on the flowers; you don't want people's eyes being bounced around the image by other things. This is partially solved by getting close to the flower because the background is blurred. Advanced photographers will know how to open up the aperture on their lens to really blue the background. Using a telephoto lens also helps isolate the flower and blur the background.

Even with a blurred background, you still need to make sure there isn't a blurred highlight that is distracting. A blurred tree or telephone pole is still a straight line cutting across the photo. A blurred white car is still a big, bright highlight.

**GET DOWN ON YOUR BELLY:** Most people stand or knee down to take photos of wildflowers,

shooting down on them. While this works with some types of sunflower-type blossoms, most flowers are best photographed from the side. That means you might have to get down on the ground to do justice to the flower. Most of my best images have been taken when I was on my belly.

**DON'T PHOTOGRAPH IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DAY:** Try to do your photography in the early morning or late afternoon. The middle part of the day has flat light and harsh shadows, but morning and afternoon light is richer, providing warmer colors. Even those boring landscapes of fields of flowers will have better colors and look better. (I still won't like them, but they are illustrative and much better than ones shot mid-day.)

So there you have it: Four simple rules for photographing the spring's blossoms. If you want to get serious about wildflower photography, most camera stores have regular lessons in photography that will do wonders for all those other things you probably don't think about: composition, lighting, using image editing software, different lens and when to use them — all the technical and artistic stuff that will make you an even better all-around photographer. There are camera clubs in most cities with people who are happy to share, and — of course — there is a plethora of on-line instruction available.

Quite frankly, it's easy to take dazzling images of wildflowers. Glamor and wildlife photography is first and foremost about having access to the beautiful subjects who let you photograph them. Wildflowers are all willing models posing en masse for us right now.

*Jim Matthews is a syndicated Southern California-based outdoor reporter and columnist. He can be reached via e-mail at [odwriter@verizon.net](mailto:odwriter@verizon.net) or by phone at 909-887-3444.*



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# Heavens to Betsy, there's no place like home

## Ridgecrest off-road racer wins hometown Motion Tire 300

BY CHRISTOPHER LIVINGSTON

*The Daily Independent*

In his father's garage, Joe David walks around his offroad vehicle, pointing out little nicks and dents that he will eventually work on. The vehicle is stripped: for example, the seats have been taken out for re-upholstering and the tires are taken off and thrown to the side. Some potentially invisible damage, such as a crack in the car's exhaust, is pointed out with a circle drawn around it.

The car's name is Betsy. And on Saturday, she gave David a win he'll never forget.

David and his father, Tom Koch, have owned Betsy for around five years. It usually takes them about a month and a half to prepare the car for the next race. Most nights, they work on the car from 6 p.m. till midnight, two to four nights out of the week.

For a car that just completed a near-300-mile race, the bumps and scratches are mostly pedestrian. With the next race coming up in June, it's almost like clockwork: they will work on what they can in the garage, with some of the more intricate details taken care of at specialty shops.

Until then, Betsy remains not only a vehicle ready to be refurbished, but also a large trophy, a symbol of pride.

"Anytime you win overall in a race, it's a confidence booster," David said. "Just seeing the support in this community – a lot of people know me because of my father, who's been racing for 30 years – it's inspiring me to be able to race."

### The race

Four hours, 30 minutes and 43 seconds.

That's all David needed to be the first to cross the finish line in the Motion Tire 300 in the hills southeast of Ridgecrest.



CHRISTOPHER LIVINGSTON/DAILY INDEPENDENT

**Joe David poses with Betsy, his off-road vehicle driven at the Motion Tire 300, at his family's garage. David won Class 1 of the weekend event, finishing in 4:30:45. Betsy will be repaired in time for her next event, the Caliente 200, in June.**

He wasn't alone in the race. Evan Meza served as his co-pilot, monitoring the car's vital signs – oil level, temperature, fluids, etc. – while also paying attention to the car's GPS to keep the duo on track.

"He did a great job," David said. "I like someone there to talk to me. The less I think about what I'm do-

ing, my focus is not too intense."

David started ninth of 10 cars in Class 1. In the first lap, he passed six vehicles, finishing that in one hour, five minutes – his fastest lap. For the second lap, he had to slow down a little due to lap traffic (the different race classes had staggered start times) and poor visibil-

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“It takes you a little longer,” he said. “They were getting in their rhythm, so you try to pass them as clean as possible. There’s a little bit of bumping every now and then, you try to tap them as light as possible. Combine that with dust and not being able to see with rocks flying everywhere.”

At the start of the third lap, David needed to make a fuel stop — roughly five minutes to put 42 gallons in the car.

With the rocky terrain doing its job on Betsy, a smooth five-mile stretch, Gasline Road, served as a reprieve. There, David hit his top speed, 131 miles per hour, going downhill.

“I’m familiar with the end of that road; it’s a test section,” he said. “I’ve spent hundreds of thousands of miles there. It’s a breath of fresh air on the track. Ridgecrest is rough, probably harder on these cars than anywhere.”

That road also serves as being just near the finish line. There’s roughly seven to 10 miles more to get to the end — but there is a challenge: Charlie’s Place.

“There are gigantic rocks all around you,” David said. “The last five to seven miles are just big boulders. Some are right next to the track; it’s close to the track as the buggy is wide. You do have to slow down on that.”

How slow? As slow as 20 to 25 miles per hour. But it’s worth it.

“When you turn right, you’re like, ‘Oh my God, thank you,’” David said. “It’s the final straightaway of the track. You know you’re done.”

Throughout the race, David had an idea he was in good position, but never knew just how far ahead he was in first place.

“Usually, when you’re that close, you can see the dust trail (of the next racer),” he said. “But it was windy.”

No single car passed him all day. He knew after the first lap that he was in third place. Somewhere between the second and third lap, he worked his way into second.

But it wasn’t until he crossed the finish line that he realized that he was by himself. (The second-place racer, John Bartol, came in two minutes later.) Then the emotions set in.

“It’s always a little emotional,” David said. “You worked so hard. It’s a reward for what you worked for. I like to use the word stoked. You’re stoked just because



**“Betsy,” driven by Joe David, takes on a small hill at the Motion Tire 300 in Ridgecrest.**

SUBMITTED PHOTO

you did it. ... There’s excitement. You’re ready to have your first beer.”

Sure, there were bumps along the way — thanks to a rocky course — but to get that first-place spot, David had to have a near-perfect race.

“It’s such a rarity in offroad (racing),” he said. “In my head, the attrition rate is usually 50 percent. You go into it with an open mind, knowing that you could have a problem.”

It wasn’t his first win this year, by the way. His first Class 1 victory was in the M.O.R.E. Slash X Duel in the Desert in Barstow back in January. That victory was in another car owned by David’s family — a smaller red buggy that was resting in the garage.

### **A busy schedule**

While racing has been a part of David’s life for as long as he can remember, it wasn’t the only thing he had on his itinerary over the weekend.

- First, he got off work at Sierra Auto Recycling at 5 p.m., then hit the Desert Empire Fairgrounds to participate in the Ridgecrest Chamber of Commerce Star Follies from 6:30 to 10:30 p.m.

- He got up at 5:30 a.m. Saturday, hit the family garage at 6:30, and was at the

starting line at 8 a.m.

- The race ended at approximately 12:30 p.m., there was a celebratory barbecue, and it was time for Night 2 of the Follies at 7:30 p.m.

The only overlap he had was on Saturday night. Due to his Follies obligation, he was unable to receive his trophy at the celebratory dinner at Tommy T’s. He did get a nice consolation package: he was given the award in front of the cast and audience at the Follies that evening.

“It’s the first year they have a trophy as a memorial for Richard (Boyle),” David said, referring to the late Motion Tire owner who was influential in bringing SNORE to Ridgecrest. “I hope that everyone remembers Richard for who he was.”

### **Coming full circle**

As David said, Saturday’s victory showed him the value of hard work and dedication.

In his first race in Ridgecrest, David went only seven miles before the control arm on his vehicle broke. His first successful ride came in Parker, Arizona, a race that he didn’t start.

“My dad did and rolled the car at mile marker 72,” David said. “He injured his

ribs, so I took over and had my first successful ride. We finished. We didn’t finish great, but it was my first finish.”

In retrospect, David said, he should have started with a smaller vehicle in Class 1 and worked his way up. But nevertheless, he learned, and working with family eased the situation.

“It’s pretty cool to be able to work with them,” David said. “Not a lot of people have the opportunity to work with family members.”

He also took some time to reflect on his community support.

“I really appreciate the Boyle and Mather families for helping support this race,” David said. “I also want to thank Brian Watters at Swift NAPA Auto Parts for his help.”

### **Moving forward**

Back in the family garage, David surveys the work that Betsy will need to be ready for the SNORE Caliente 250 in early June.

“The right lower control arm took on a rock at about 50 miles per hour,” David said. “I hesitated on a corner, bent the arm.”

He continues walking around the vehicle: “The right rear arm,” he says, pointing at the long slab of metal with small dents on the sides. “We’ll have to prep the CVs and axles. By the time you get power on the axles, it’s 600 to 550 horsepower on the ground.”

David is no stranger to the Caliente 250. He competed in the event only once, with an unfavorable result, so he is looking forward to the challenge.

“Every race, I take it one race at a time,” he said. “It’s a thought process as far as you can’t go in and think you’re gonna dominate everyone because if something happens, you’ll be disappointed.”

“My expectation is to do well. I’m not going into it saying we’ll beat everyone. I want to pace my time. If I can drive comfortably, I will. My goal is not to hurt the car. My goal is to pace myself off someone’s time, and if I have to, I’ll increase (my speed).”

That doesn’t mean that he doesn’t expect to do well, however.

“Hopefully in Top 3,” he said, grinning. ❖



# Pro baseball slides into home in Cal City

## *Pecos League's Whiptails start play May 25 at Balsitis Park*

BY JACK BARNWELL  
*The Daily Independent*

The grass is ready, the field's in great shape, and the anticipation for the crack as the first ball hits the bat can be described as only tangible in California City.

Come May 25, East Kern County hosts the season opener of its first professional minor league baseball team at California City's Balsitis Park.

The California City Whiptails, part of the five-team expansion push into California by the independent Pecos League, will call the ballfield home, according to the agreement signed Jan. 10 with the city.

The Pecos League is a set of independent teams in the Mountain and Pacific regions. The 12-team league, founded in 2010, recruits mostly from the college ranks. Teams are established in cities that don't have major- or minor-league-affiliated teams.

Within Kern County and the High Desert, the Whiptails join two other Pecos teams: the Bakersfield Train Robbers and the Adelanto Yardbirds.

In the case of Bakersfield and Adelanto, Minor League Baseball pulled their respective Class A-Advanced teams — the Bakersfield Blaze and High Desert Mavericks — at the end of the 2016 season. The Mavericks, after the move was announced during the season, won the California League Championship in the team's final season. The Pecos League stepped in to fill the void and will occupy Sam Lynn Ballpark and Adelanto Stadium.

"We're ready for our baseball season, with spring training on May 16," said Andrew Dunn, Pecos League commissioner, during a community gathering April 15. "Before you know it, [the season] is here."

Tickets for California City games will cost \$6 for general admission, and \$3 for 12 and under. Children 5 and under will get in free. Season tickets will cost \$200.

Currently, the team is holding tryouts. Dunn and the three team managers



JACK BARNWELL/DAILY INDEPENDENT

**California City Whiptails field manager Sip Garza poses for a photo with Whippy, the baseball team's mascot, on Saturday, April 15, prior to a media event.**

present at the April 15 meeting conducted general tryouts in Adelanto and Monterey County on April 15 and 16 to assess talent for the entire league.

A team roster will be released the day before the first game. Dunn explained that there are typically a lot of last-minute items to consider, like college players just graduating.

"The roster will be ready in May, there will be an exhibition team, and then the regular season starts May 25," Dunn said.

Sip Garza, the Whiptails manager for the inaugural season, comes from Miami, Florida.

April 15 was his first time in California City, a place he said he will be excited to call home for the season.

"We look forward to having great players we're bringing in; work continues on improving the roster," Garza

said. "We're trying to put not only good players, but good people into the community."

Garza said the Whiptails hope to do a lot of outreach in the community.

"I know this is our first year in California City, so people are excited and don't know what's going to happen, but

I don't know either," Garza said. "We'll figure it out together."

The mascot is a whiptail, named after a very fast and common desert lizard that lives in the desert in and around California City.

The team colors — gray, royal and navy blue, and white — are reminiscent of a juvenile whiptail, which is a spotted gray with a bright blue tail. The team mascot, Whippy, has been welcomed with enthusiasm to local events and Little League openers.

California City will utilize umpires

from Bakersfield and Tehachapi.

The games will be a little different in California City compared to Bakersfield and Adelanto, according to California City Chamber of Commerce president Alexia Svejda.

Svejda was decked out in 1920s-era attire, from the classic dress to the cloche hat, something she said is reflective of the fact California City has a baseball field, not a stadium.

"The way people will be sitting is they will be sitting really close to the game, which you don't when you're at a stadium," Svejda said. "That got me thinking it's going to be like old-fashioned baseball."

She said the added benefit is that it sets California City aside from other teams.

Renovations to the currently unnamed field at Balsitis Park have been made. Svejda said that center field has been pushed out to meet pro baseball requirements, the field has been leveled, and the infield has been sodded. Dugouts are being built.

"The field is ready," she said. "We can play."

What still needs to be done is the batter's screen and spectator fencing to allow beer sales. The Chamber is spearheading a fundraising effort to secure better seating options.

Other long term items would be nice, but Svejda noted, "There's no reason to do something that doesn't have to be done yet."

### Host families needed

The Whiptails are looking for host families to house players for the season. Most players are between the ages of 18 and 22 and receive a very small salary for playing.

Around 20 homes are needed for the season between May 20 and July 29. The team will be traveling 29 days.

Dunn noted that the players may be traveling back from some games and return at around 11:30 at night.

"A place for players to stay is the main thing," he said.





# California City Whiptails 2017 schedule

**Spring training**  
**Saturday, May 20: at Bakersfield**  
**Sunday, May 21: vs. Monterey**

**Regular season**  
**May 25-28: vs. High Desert**  
**May 29-31: vs. Monterey**

**June 1-2: vs. Hollywood**  
**June 3: at Bakersfield**  
**June 4: vs. Bakersfield**  
**June 5: at Bakersfield**  
**June 7: vs. Hollywood**  
**June 8-9: at High Desert**  
**June 10-12: at Monterey**  
**June 13-14: vs. Tucson**  
**June 15-19: vs. Hollywood**  
**June 20-21: at Bakersfield**  
**June 22-23: vs. Hollywood**  
**June 24-26: at Monterey**  
**June 27-29: at Bakersfield**  
**June 30: at High Desert**

**July 1: at High Desert**  
**July 2: vs. Bakersfield**  
**July 3: vs. Hollywood**  
**July 4: vs. High Desert**  
**July 5: vs. Hollywood**  
**July 6-9: at Tucson**  
**July 10-11: vs. Hollywood**  
**July 13-14: vs. Tucson**  
**July 15-18: vs. Hollywood**  
**July 19: at Bakersfield**  
**July 20-23: at Tucson**  
**July 24: at Bakersfield**  
**July 25-26: vs. Hollywood**  
**July 27: vs. Bakersfield**  
**July 28-29: at Bakersfield**

T.J. Zarewicz, the manager for the Pecos League's Santa Fe Fuego, added his own thoughts as a former player.

"Mostly, it's just a place to sleep and do some laundry," Zarewicz said. "A typical day in the Pecos League is, say you have a game that starts at 7 p.m., guys will start batting practice three hours prior to the first pitch. If he wants to get in extra practice, a player might show up an hour prior to that."

A person might show up at the field around 3 p.m., then the 7 p.m. game, which lasts at least two and a half hours. A player might not return home until 11 p.m.

"It's long days so these guys will definitely sleep in," he said.

Justin Thompson, manager for the Monterey Amberjacks, called host families the league's support system.

"Without you guys, it's hard to run this whole thing, especially the Pacific division," Thompson said. "I've come to realize in the last year that a lot of these relationships that have been forged with communities are still going on today. We are talking with their kids, doing lessons and instruction. Players go the extra mile, whether it's playing ball with your son or daughter, cooking or barbecuing, it becomes a seamless part of what you're doing at home."

Contact Beth Riley at (714) 904-1009 for more details.

## California City an opportunity

Dunn said there are challenges come from starting a new team up from scratch.

"We have and had been part of 23 teams over nine years and currently have 12 teams," Dunn said. "Obviously

there are reasons a place like Topeka, Kansas, isn't successful. It comes down to engagement of the community and the players, having a league where every team has an equal chance of winning, and having a manager that is non-confrontational with the community. If you have those things, you are successful."

He added that "we're not trying to set anything new for the record books, we're just trying to get a solid group of guys who are looking to get off to a start."

Dunn said Pecos League teams will take a different approach compared to the Minor League teams.

"If you look at the three areas (Adelanto, Monterey, and Bakersfield), Monterey/Salinas area never got a baseball team since the Spurs and Peppers moved out. They've tried to get Bakersfield['s team] but elected not to build a stadium. We were willing to go to Monterey and take a risk playing at the existing stadium that they have," Dunn said.

He said Pecos putting stakes down in Bakersfield makes sense because it will have the potential to be a very successful program. "We think it will be a great tradition continued there," he said.

"High Desert is an entirely different story — we're not going to sue the city, we're going to pay our bills and we're not going to go to newspapers, threaten and get in a standoff," Dunn said in reference to the messy fight between the Mavericks and the city of Adelanto regarding the stadium lease terms.

He said California City is very much like Alamogordo, New Mexico — located near Holloman Air Force Base and home to the Pecos League's Pupfish team — in size and terms of location.

The Pupfish were previously located in White Sands, New Mexico, and relocated to Alamogordo. It's a great opportunity and crucial location.

"Bakersfield needs Cal City, Adelanto needs Cal City, and Monterey needs Cal City," Dunn said. "It fits the puzzle of what we are trying to do. If you look at the schedule, it is a mixture of weekday and weekend games. I think this will be successful — there will be a lot of learning about what goes on here, but at the end of the first month, I think people will be glad to have baseball here."

## Community impact

Svejda said this will bring new opportunities both on and off the baseball field.

"This is a neat thing for folks to be doing," Svejda said. "We are right at Edwards Air Force Base, so this is another thing for folks to do out here. People say there is nothing to do here, but there is. But pro baseball? We've never had that before. This is awesome."

She added this will bring recognition to California City.

"People are now asking where is California City, and they are looking us up," she said, noting that Chamber website traffic spiked after the story about the Whiptails leaked.

Economically, Svejda said she sees more people going to restaurants, possibly staying in the hotels.

"Our nonprofits will be doing the concessions, so they are getting the direct benefit of those sales," she said. They will share those proceeds with the league.

For more information on the Whiptails, visit

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JACK BARNWELL/DAILY INDEPENDENT

A group of riders attempt to rope a steer Sunday, March 12, at the Desert Empire Fairground and Event Center's rodeo arena.

# Much more than the fair at the fairgrounds

With 2017 already in full swing, the Desert Empire Fairgrounds and Event Center is looking to make an impression with a number of events — and continue acting as a hub for the Indian Wells Valley event.

DEF executive director Chip Holloway sees a lot of

potential this year, and already has made an impact.

“We have the Ridgecrest Chamber Community Follies for over 10 years, we have become the home of the RCA Church Easter Egg hunt, and Daily Independent Home Show,” Holloway said.

For a small fairgrounds in an isolated region like the

Indian Wells Valley, it sure packed a punch in 2015, Holloway said.

“According to the latest state economic study DEFEC generated over \$8 million in direct and indirect spending activity in the IWV,” Holloway said. “In many cases that is new dollars that wouldn't enter our

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economy otherwise.”

The California Department of Food and Agriculture Fairs and Exposition Branch has the data to back it up. According to its report on 2015, DEF generated \$8.23 million in spending activity from the events held at the fairgrounds. This created “a ripple effect of economic benefits for California,” according to the report.

The events at the fairgrounds in 2015 also created the equivalent of 75 jobs as a result of spending at the fairgrounds, its support businesses and its attendees. The labor income was reported at approximately \$2.56 million. This is direct and indirect from events held at the fairgrounds, not just the annual fair itself.

“We have increased the number and type of events in 2016 and 2017 so those number should only increase,” Holloway said.

Activity is only expected to increase going into the summer, including the May 6 Friends of the NRA auction and dinner.

“We are proud of our new partnership with the NRA and their annual

fundraising dinner for the next 3 years,” Holloway said.

The Desert Empire Fairgrounds will host the 2017 Desert Valleys Federal Credit Union “Duel in the Desert” Saturday, May 20, at 7:30 p.m.

“Our new signature event for 2017 will be Desert Valleys FCU ‘Duel in the Desert’ European style motorcycle speedway race,” Holloway said. “This was very popular about a decade ago and our new five-year partnership with DVFCU assures it will become a staple.

The event will be the first annual speedway motorcycle event at the fairgrounds, featuring motorcycle racing and extreme sidecars. Tickets will be \$15 or \$50 for a four-pack, while kids 6 and under go in for free.

As the year progresses, Holloway said other events will make its way into the calendar.

“We are expecting another Karz for Kidz show and Glo Run this summer,” Holloway said. We are hoping to have another Christian concert and well as a couple of more music genres in the fall. We also are developing a Ridgecrest Legends dinner and hoping to bring in

some unique and different events like comics, nightclub type acts and get people used to coming out here more often. Of course the fair is Oct. 20-22 and we are excited to thank all our local heroes with our theme ‘Honoring Courage, Saluting Sacrifice.’”

Santa’s Art Shop will return the first weekend in December, marking an annual staple of holiday shopping and showcasing of artistic and crafts talents for local and regional vendors.

The fairgrounds is home to some type of horse event or another, including gymkhana and rodeo round ups on the weekend.

“Our horse and rodeo events are growing and we remain one of the best venues in the region,” Holloway said. “We have weekly roping and sorting, monthly gymkhana, and expect more high school-age and other rodeo events. We are also trying to book a PBR-style bull riding event. All this creates interest and encourages participation by our youth in Junior Livestock and 4H activities.”

### A brief history

Since the 1950s, the Desert Empire Fair has been a staple for the Indian Wells Valley, an effort initially started by the Ridgecrest Chamber of Commerce as the Desert Stampede. Its first “Bigtop” tent launched in 1954, which introduced agricultural and other exhibits.

A set of strong winds in 1957 and 1961 proved a bane for the Bigtop, showing the need for more solid infrastructure. In 1965, two years after Ridgecrest was incorporated, the Desert Empire Fair became an independent entity and purchased the site on which it is located now.

It held a “mortgage burning” in 1967 to signify complete ownership. According to the Desert Empire Fair, “With the occupancy of the grounds, enthusiastic volunteers constructed fencing and water lines, graded the land, made the parking lot, and prepared the site for the new ‘Bigtop.’ The Navy Seabees provided immense support in this effort.”

Joshua Hall, the oldest building on the fairgrounds, was constructed in 1971 after the new Bigtop was knocked down opening day of the annual fair.

In December 1974, the fairgrounds became part of California’s State Fair

System, creating the 53rd Agricultural District, “encompassing that portion of Kern County lying east of the Los Angeles Aqueduct.”

### Evolving, adapting

Over the years, the fairgrounds have evolved and shifted, changing purpose, including having to adapt to tougher economic realities as Gov. Jerry Brown examined ways to trim the California budget during the Great Recession and state fiscal crisis.

In 2011, Brown signed a budget that ended \$32 million in subsidies to the 78-fair network under the auspices of the Department of Food and Agriculture. Subsidies and checks ranged from \$20,000 to \$200,000, depending on the size.

This created some stress on the DEF in the following years, leading it, like other fairgrounds up and down the state, to expand what it offers.

In 2017, DEF and Desert Valleys Credit Union agreed to a five-year deal. Desert Valleys paid more than \$25,000 over that period to acquire naming rights for Mesquite Hall, the fairgrounds’ largest available venue, as well being presenting sponsor for the new Duel in the Desert race. Desert Valleys provided a large flat-screen television that will be in the newly-renamed Desert Valleys FCU Community Complex.

The deal provides an early termination clause that allows Desert Valleys to opt out or for DEF to exit should a larger sponsor step forward with a better offer.

In addition, the fairgrounds has always received support from the 501(c)(3) nonprofit Friends of the Fair. The organization raises money for the fairgrounds from various events and concession stands, which provides funds for different needs.

“The bottom line is with the lack of state funding we cannot remain viable asset to the community without the support of community sponsors and constantly attracting events, whether created internally or promoted by others,” Holloway said. “We are always open to new ideas and welcome partnerships with those who have a vision but maybe not the courage to try something new.”❖

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# Concert in the Rocks celebrates musical legends June 3

Tickets are on sale now for the annual Concert in the Rocks, held each June in one of America's greatest and most unique outdoor venues, Lone Ranger Canyon in the Alabama Hills.

This year's event features Six String Society, a celebrated group of singers and musicians who will perform the music of some of America's greatest legends, including Janis Joplin, Robert Johnson, Jimi Hendrix, Amy Winehouse, Jim Morrison, and Kurt Cobain – all unofficial members of the "27 Club." According to show promoter Kenneth Rexrode of Rexrode Productions, all of these legendary performers were just 27 when they died, leaving their fans and the world wondering about the music they might have created.

The show celebrates their lives and music with a wide range of talent that includes vocalists Casey Hensley, Whitney Shay, and Leonard Patton, and musicians Robin Henkel; guitarists Greg Douglass, Anthony Cullins, and Anthony Contreras; bassist James East; drummer Evan Caleb Yearsley; saxophonist Johnny Viau, and keyboardist Jody Bagley. For more information on these musicians, visit the website at [www.thesixstringsociety.com](http://www.thesixstringsociety.com).

According to Rexrode, Six String Society is a musical theater group with many performers, and no two shows are ever cast the same. Each show tells a different story, and is a one-of-a-kind experience. Rexrode, who produced the popular Highwayman Show, featuring Tony Suraci, at Concert in the Rocks in 2015, has staged performances in Southern California and plans to tour his troupe in Europe and Asia.

A cocktail reception for Museum of Western Film History members begins at 4:30 p.m. Saturday, June 3, at the museum at 701 S. Main Street. The shuttle bus to Lone Ranger Canyon in the Alabama Hills is at 5 p.m. from the museum parking lot for ticket holders. Transportation to the concert is by shuttle bus only. Sit-down dinner begins at the concert site at 6 p.m. followed by the show.

Concert and dinner is \$80 per person. For tickets, please call the museum at 760-876-9103. For more details, visit [www.museumofwesternfilmhistory.org/concert](http://www.museumofwesternfilmhistory.org/concert).



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## 7th Annual Live Butterfly Release

Please join **Ridgecrest Regional Hospital** and Hospice for the *7th Annual Live Butterfly Release*. The community is invited to help raise funds for Hospice by sponsoring a Painted Lady butterfly in memory or in honor of a loved one.

The celebration will include recitation of names (forms to be turned in by May 1st to have the name in the program), release of Painted Lady butterflies, and reception to follow.

**Enrollment forms are available at Hospice or at [www.rrh.org](http://www.rrh.org) and can be mailed to Hospice:**

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# Cruise on over to these classic car shows

**W**hether you're an enthusiast that wants to see some of the best classic cars out there, or you want to enter your own to show off a little to others, these great shows in and near the Ridgecrest area offer the perfect way to do so. It's easy to enjoy all that comes from bringing the family out for a great time at a show where you can see some of the coolest cars, enjoy live entertainment and try some of the yummy foods from local vendors.

## Night at the Races

Every year in July, a Night at the Races brings together classic and custom cars at the Kern County Raceway. You can enjoy more out of the night with the vendors, food and live music. Bring the whole family for a day spent watching

these classics show off their stuff when set up. For more info: 661-835-1264.

## Cruise-In with Hot Rod Dogz

With this monthly event taking place every fourth Saturday at Hot Rod Dogz in Lancaster, you can expect to find many great cars. You will also find deals on food, free raffles that are ongoing throughout the day and live DJs to bring plenty of music and live entertainment. Movies are sometimes shown when the sun sets, complete with free popcorn. Bring your classic or come out to see the ones that show up. For more info: 661-948-3649.

## Open Test & Tune

If you're looking for a little fun and like to hear those powerful engines





PHOTO BY JOHN PHELAN VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

**Classics such as these are on display at many car shows within an easy drive of Ridgecrest.**

revving, this annual event at Famoso Raceway showcases some of the hottest hot rods you've ever seen. While this isn't a typical car show, it is one of the most popular drag races on the west coast, and fans fill up the stadiums fast. Open Test & Tune happens in March, June and September and you can catch some of the best custom built cars, trucks and bikes all out for a show. This weekend-long event will also have refreshments for you to enjoy while you watch the races. Take your time at the show and get some close looks at some of the hottest and fastest cars on the west coast. For more info: 661- 399-5351.

### **El Paseo Cruise Night**

Come out and watch the classic cars on parade the first and third Friday every month in Palm Desert. From 3PM to 6PM, you can see the classics and customs ride down the road and show off a little to the crowds. After the parade, they park and show off the engines and insides of the vehicles. From restorations to custom built and one of a kind paint jobs, you can find it all on El Paseo Boulevard. For more information, you can call (760) 346-8965.

### **Frazier Park Cruise Night**

The first Friday of every month starting in May, you can come out to watch the classics line up and go for a drive. Speak with the drivers after and grab some drinks at Falcon's Nest. Starting at 5PM, you can watch as they all parade down the street then park in the parking lot with their hoods up. Check out some of the classics, speak with the owners or bring your classic out for a spin with the others.

Go to one show or plan a steady summer by going to them all and check out each of the classic and custom cars being shown. It's guaranteed fun to watch the drivers as they parade down the streets and showcase the hard work that they put into the vehicles. Many shows offer vendors, live music and delicious food and fun for people of all ages. ❖

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